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Citation: Taylor, Avram (2014) 'Are you a Billy, or a Dan, or an old tin can?': street violence and relations between Catholics, Jews and Protestants in the Gorbals during the inter-war years. *Urban History*, 41 (1). pp. 124-140. ISSN 0963-9268

Published by: Cambridge University Press

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0963926812000776>
<<http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0963926812000776>>

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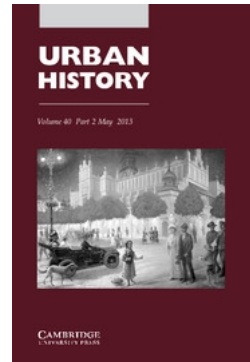
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Urban History / FirstView Article / April 2013, pp 1 - 17

DOI: 10.1017/S0963926812000776, Published online: 03 January 2013

Link to this article: http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0963926812000776

How to cite this article:

AVRAM TAYLOR ‘Are you a Billy, or a Dan, or an old tin can?’: street violence and relations between Catholics, Jews and Protestants in the Gorbals during the inter-war years. Urban History, Available on CJO 2013 doi:10.1017/S0963926812000776

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‘Are you a Billy, or a Dan, or an old tin can?’: street violence and relations between Catholics, Jews and Protestants in the Gorbals during the inter-war years

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ABSTRACT: This article makes use of memoirs, autobiographies and oral interviews in order to consider the relations between the Catholic, Jewish and Protestant communities in the Gorbals. While there was considerable variation in individual experience, there were also particular occasions where inter-ethnic relations were all too predictable, almost following a ‘calendar of conflict’. The article shows that, while there was a degree of anti-Semitism in the area, integration between the Jewish and non-Jewish residents of the district was facilitated by a number of factors. Ultimately, anti-Semitism was mediated through the sectarian rivalry, which was the dominant religious conflict in the city.

The history of the Gorbals district of Glasgow is of interest to both historians and social scientists for a number of reasons. In popular memory, the area is inextricably linked with ‘razor gangs’, crime, street violence and poverty – an association that has partly been shaped by Alexander McArthur and Herbert Kingsley Long’s book *No Mean City*. First published in 1935, it depicts a poverty-stricken underworld, characterized by brutal encounters between rival gangs that has structured perceptions of the city ever since its publication.¹ Another aspect of life in the Gorbals, however, is less widely known, namely its ethnic and religious diversity. The area contained Catholic, Jewish and Protestant communities which interacted with each other in a variety of ways, and it thus offers a fascinating example of inter-ethnic relations.

* I would particularly like to thank Daniel Laqua for his support and his comments on earlier drafts of this article. I should also like to thank Don MacRaild and anonymous referees for their helpful comments.

¹ A. McArthur and H. Kingsley Long, *No Mean City* (London, 1957). The longevity of the image of Glasgow portrayed in *No Mean City* can be seen in the continued use of the phrase in depictions of the city: see e.g. the 1988 Glasgow Centre for Housing Research report, Duncan MacLennan, *Glasgow No Mean City to Miles Better* (Glasgow, 1988).

Focusing on the inter-war years, this article examines the lived experience of the Jewish community in the Gorbals. It discusses its relationship with the Catholic and Protestant communities, and considers the ways in which sectarian tensions between the two larger communities predominated over anti-Semitism. To investigate these issues, it is necessary to look at the tactics that ensured daily co-existence, but also at the more exceptional violent expressions of religious and ethnic conflict. It will be seen that the residents of the district adopted patterns of behaviour that essentially allowed them to live side by side and interact with each other, but that the fabric of everyday life was subject to instances of violent rupture. The individual's experience of these divisions, however, was mediated by age, class, gender, ethnicity, religious affiliation, individual temperament and even the street they lived on.

Although historians of Anglo-Jewry have traditionally tended to neglect Scotland, this lacuna has been remedied in recent years. Whilst the primary focus of scholarship in this field has been on Edinburgh and Glasgow, Nathan Abrams' recent study of seven small communities in Scotland outside the two major cities has offered a broader picture.² In regard to the history of Jews in Glasgow, studies have addressed various aspects of Jewish life in the city, including education, religion, health and welfare.³ Relations between the Jewish and Irish communities in Glasgow have also been considered, notably by William Kenefick who argued that they provide 'a clear example of good inter-ethnic relations and the identification of shared values and similarities'.⁴

The focus of the current article is distinct, as it is both narrower – having an explicit focus on the Gorbals itself – and broader, inasmuch as it is a study of all three religious communities in the district. This piece draws on fresh primary materials, notably a set of 17 interviews with elderly members of the Jewish community in Glasgow, conducted by the author himself. The article represents the first sustained attempt at using oral testimony in order to offer an interpretation of the dynamics of inter-ethnic relations in the Gorbals from a Jewish perspective. Of course, any account of the past comes up against the limitations of the evidence and

² N. Abrams, *Caledonian Jews: A Study of Seven Small Communities in Scotland* (Jefferson, NC, 2009), 1–2. Kenneth Collins has done much to lay the foundations of work in this field. See for example K. Collins (ed.), *Aspects of Scottish Jewry* (Glasgow, 1987), and *idem*, *Scotland's Jews: A Guide to the History and Community of the Jews in Scotland* (Glasgow, 1999).

³ Kenneth Collins' pioneering work includes *Second City Jewry* (Glasgow, 1990) and *Be Well! Jewish Health and Welfare in Glasgow, 1860–1914* (East Linton, 2001). Other scholars have subsequently built on his work. See also H. Maitles, 'Jewish trade unionists in Glasgow', *Immigrants and Minorities*, 10 (1991), 46–60, and B. Braber, *Jews in Glasgow 1879–1939: Immigration and Integration* (Edgware, 2007).

⁴ W. Kenefick, 'Comparing the Jewish and Irish communities in twentieth-century Scotland', in D. Cesarani, T. Kushner and M. Shain (eds.), *Place and Displacement in Jewish History and Memory Zakor v' Makor* (London and Portland, OR, 2009), 55. See also W. Kenefick, 'Jewish and Catholic Irish relations: the Glasgow waterfront c.1880–1914', in D. Cesarani and G. Romain (eds.), *Jews and Port Cities 1590–1900: Commerce, Community and Cosmopolitanism* (London and Portland, OR, 2006), 215–35.

the partiality of the sources. These problems are particularly prominent when relying on memoirs – in this case autobiographical accounts by Jewish authors – and on oral testimony.⁵ This article acknowledges that oral sources raise particular methodological challenges; in this context, it follows Alistair Thomson in recognizing that ‘oral history is not simply “the voice of the past”; it is a living record of the complex interaction between past and present within each individual and in society’.⁶ There is no longer a Jewish community in the Gorbals, and none of the respondents currently live in the district. Their life experiences after leaving the Gorbals varied considerably as did their degree of social mobility. Thus, although their perceptions of the period of their lives that they were questioned about was obviously coloured by both their subsequent experiences and the way in which they wish to portray their own past, it is difficult to determine precisely how these influences shaped their responses. Finally, even if oral testimony reveals varying accounts of everyday life in the community, these contrasting voices alert us to the different experiences of religious and ethnic tensions.

This article makes use of a range of insights from other studies of immigration and ethnicity. As Maria Vassilikou has pointed out in her work on Greeks and Jews in Salonika and Odessa, the interaction between different ethnic groups should not be seen ‘solely through the lens of ethnic conflict and communal violence’.⁷ She depicts a more complex set of relations between the two groups in her study in which ‘Contact ranged from mutual indifference, cooperation and tolerance to animosity’.⁸ This sense of a continuum of prejudice has famously been outlined by Gordon W. Allport who identifies a spectrum of prejudice which ranged from antilocution, or expressing prejudice verbally, avoidance, discrimination, physical attack and finally extermination.⁹ Allport’s typology of prejudice is particularly useful in bringing out the hidden aspects of prejudice. As he says, ‘[w]hat people actually do in relation to groups they dislike is not always directly related to what they think or feel about them’.¹⁰ This point is important to bear in mind when considering the relations between the Catholic, Jewish and Protestant communities in the Gorbals.

⁵ For a description of the autobiographies in question, see A. Taylor, ‘“Remembering spring through Gorbals voices”: autobiography and the memory of a community’, *Immigrants and Minorities*, 28 (2010), 1–30. On oral history, see: P. Summerfield, ‘Culture and composure: creating narratives of the gendered self in oral history interviews’, *Cultural and Social History*, 1 (2004), 65; R. Perks and A. Thomson (eds.), *The Oral History Reader* (London and New York, 1998).

⁶ A. Thomson, ‘Unreliable memories? The use and abuse of oral history’, in W. Lamont (ed.), *Historical Controversies and Historians* (London, 1998), 28.

⁷ D. Cesarani, ‘Port Jews, concepts, cases and questions’, in D. Cesarani (ed.), *Port Jews in Cosmopolitan Maritime Trading Centres, 1550–1950* (London and Portland, OR, 2002), 8.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁹ G.W. Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice* (Reading, MA, 1954), 14–15.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.

The road to Gorbals Cross: the making of 'A Scottish Shtetl'

Approximately 15,000 Jews lived in Glasgow during the inter-war years – considerably fewer than in Manchester and Leeds, which were the largest provincial communities in this period.¹¹ There was an established and affluent Jewish community in the Garnethill district of Glasgow before 1880, the date at which the main period of Jewish immigration from the Pale of Settlement began.¹² This small community was shaped by a broader transformation during which Eastern European Jews migrated westwards at the end of the nineteenth century as a result of their worsening position within Tsarist Russia.¹³ Estimates suggest that between 120,000 and 150,000 East European Jews moved to Britain between 1881 and 1914.¹⁴ The majority of these new arrivals to the country settled in the East End of London, although significant communities developed in some provincial cities.¹⁵

Glasgow's East European Jewish migrants predominantly settled in the Gorbals, and by the 1880s the area had acquired a distinctively Jewish character.¹⁶ As V.D. Lipman puts it, the Jewish community in the Gorbals became a 'working-class, Yiddish-speaking community, orthodox in religious practice, and separate from the middle-class, acculturated Jewish community of the west end'.¹⁷ Chaim Bermant describes how it felt to move from the small Latvian village of Barovke to Glasgow in 1937 in his autobiography:

Our first address was the Gorbals where Father had lodgings with distant relatives and the Gorbals, somehow, was less intimidating than other parts of the town for it reminded me vaguely of Dvinsk. There were Yiddish posters on the hoardings, Hebrew lettering on the shops, Jewish names, Jewish faces, Jewish butchers, Jewish bakers with Jewish bread, and Jewish grocers with barrels of herring in the doorway. The herrings in particular brought a strong whiff of home. One heard Yiddish in the streets – more so, in fact, than English – and one encountered figures who would not have been put of place in Barovke.¹⁸

In his study of the 1901 census, Harvey L. Kaplan found that 75 per cent of the Jews of the Gorbals lived in 20 streets centred around Main Street.¹⁹ It appears that these streets continued to be the main areas of Jewish

¹¹ D. Cesarani, 'The transformation of communal authority in Anglo-Jewry 1914–1940', in D. Cesarani (ed.), *The Making of Modern Anglo-Jewry* (Oxford, 1990), 118.

¹² C. Bermant, *Troubled Eden: An Anatomy of British Jewry* (London, 1969), 55.

¹³ For an account of the position of Jews in the Tsarist empire and their responses to their deteriorating situation see: A. Polonsky *The Jews in Poland and Russia*, vol. II: 1881 to 1914 (Oxford and Portland, OR, 2010), 3–39.

¹⁴ T.M. Endelman, *The Jews of Britain, 1656 to 2000* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2002), 127.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 129–30.

¹⁶ Collins, *Second City*, 46–7. Cf. P. Leese, B. Piatek and I. Curyllo-Klag (eds.), *The British Migrant Experience, 1700–2000: An Anthology* (Basingstoke, 2002), 285–6.

¹⁷ V.D. Lipman, *A History of the Jews in Britain since 1858* (Leicester and London, 1990), 56.

¹⁸ C. Bermant, *Coming Home* (London, 1976), 52–3.

¹⁹ H.L. Kaplan, *The Gorbals Jewish Community in 1901* (Glasgow, 2006), 9.

occupation in the inter-war years. However, the centre of the community shifted to Abbotsford Place and its continuation into South Portland Street after the opening of the largest Synagogue in the south side of the city in 1901 in that street.²⁰ In addition, this street also housed two significant communal meeting places, Geneen's Kosher Hotel which opened in 1928 and the Jewish Institute which opened in 1935.²¹ Although by far the greatest number of foreign-born Jews in the Gorbals were from the Russian Empire, this should not obscure the diversity in origin of the settlers. Kaplan found that, 'The Jews of the Gorbals were born in no fewer than 16 countries. 28 per cent were born in Glasgow, and 30 per cent in Scotland as a whole. 56 per cent of Gorbals Jewry (2,578) are listed as having been born in the vast Russian Empire – most likely the Pale of Settlement (including Poland).'²²

Jewish immigrants settled in the Gorbals partly because of its growing community of people from a similar background, and partly because of the availability of cheap accommodation.²³ The accommodation was not cheap without reason: although the quality of the housing within the area varied, much of it could be justifiably be described as 'slum' property.²⁴ Official concern about the state of the housing in the Gorbals can be traced back to the 1860s, and by the middle of twentieth century the district had become the most notorious slum in Britain.²⁵ However, as J.G. Robb has shown, despite its reputation as a slum district, and a general lowering of social status in the area during the nineteenth century, there was a continued middle-class presence in the Gorbals until the 1940s.²⁶

Poverty in the Gorbals was partially ameliorated by the charitable organizations of the Jewish residents of the Gorbals, who recreated a rich associational life for themselves.²⁷ This extended beyond the various Synagogues housed by the district to encompass the political idealism of the Workers' Circle, the Jewish Institute, which hosted a range of social activities, and youth groups like the Jewish Lads' Brigade (JLB), which aimed to instil a degree of patriotism in its members, to give some notable examples.²⁸ It is also worth noting that the Glasgow division of the JLB included a Jewish pipe band complete with kilts and sporrans amongst its regular activities.²⁹

²⁰ The Mitchell Library G1296 0941435 GLA *Glasgow Jewish Year Book 1937–1938* (Glasgow, 1938), 43

²¹ Braber, *Jews*, 99 and 162.

²² H.L. Kaplan, *The Gorbals*, 10–11.

²³ H Maitles, 'Jewish trade unionists in Glasgow', *Immigrants and Minorities*, 10 (1991), 51.

²⁴ Collins, *Second City*, 11.

²⁵ J.G. Robb, 'Suburb and slum in the Gorbals: social and residential change 1800–1900', in G. Gordon and B. Dicks (eds.), *Scottish Urban History* (Aberdeen, 1983), 130 and 135.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 164.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 13–14 and 71.

²⁸ Braber, *Jews*, 97 and 161–2. For a comprehensive list of Jewish organizations in Glasgow during the period see *Glasgow Jewish Year Book 1937–1938*.

²⁹ H.M. Livingstone, 'From Strength to Strength': 100 Years of Service 1903–2003 *Celebrating the Centenary of the Glasgow Jewish Lads' Brigade* (Glasgow, 2003), 20.

This, however, is not to say that participation in such groups precluded mixing with non-Jewish people. There was also a generational difference within the Jewish community as a whole in Britain, as the second generation tended to adopt different patterns of behaviour from their parents. As Todd L. Endelman points out, 'The children of the immigrants were drawn to the popular culture of the non-Jewish population more than the Old World culture of their parents ... They preferred to spend their leisure time at the billiard hall, the cinema, the theatre, the dance hall, the football stadium, the racetrack, and the boxing arena.'³⁰ As a case in point, two of my female respondents describe the social life of their older brothers as being characterized by a free movement between Jewish organizations and arenas where they associated with their non-Jewish contemporaries such as the cinema and the snooker hall. Although many young Jewish men regularly attended the Jewish Institute, the Workers' Circle or the sports club, the Maccabi, this did not prevent them from also socializing with their non-Jewish peers.³¹ Furthermore, as these organizations were not, in themselves, exclusive, social boundaries were generally porous. For example, some non-Jewish people joined the Workers' Circle either as a result of their political sympathies, or simply so they could go dancing on Sundays.³²

Before the arrival of the Jews from Eastern Europe, the Gorbals was already host to two groups of incomers, Highlanders and Irish migrants. In fact, mid-nineteenth-century Glasgow drew its non-native population largely from Scotland and Ireland.³³ Highlanders made their way to Glasgow as a result of the Clearances in the early nineteenth century, recurring famines or the failure of the potato crop in 1845, although many were temporary migrants.³⁴ The Irish Catholic population of the city was greatly increased by the Famine of the 1840s, although Irish immigration gradually fell off during the second half of the century.³⁵ Glasgow's Irish migrants settled in particular areas – the Gorbals, but also Anderston and Bridgeton.³⁶

It would be difficult to make sense of Jewish community life in the Gorbals, without considering the ethnic tensions that preceded the arrival of Eastern European Jews. The violence and antipathy which Irish migrants

³⁰ Endelman, *Jews*, 205.

³¹ Tape: Mrs Laski – 21.7.05 – 2210–20; Tape: Mrs Cohen – 26.4.02 – Side 2 – 1460–70. The Glasgow branch of the Maccabi goes back to the formation of the Bar Kochba in 1933, which was the first Jewish sports club in Glasgow, and was based in the Talmud Torah building on Turriff Street in the Gorbals. www.theglasgowstory.com/image.php accessed 7 Jul. 2011, 1.

³² Tape: Mr Levy – 21.7.05 – 1970; Tape: Mrs Cohen – 26.4.02 – Side 2 – 2135–45.

³³ C. Withers, 'The demographic history of the city, 1831–1911', in H.W. Fraser and I. Maver (eds.), *Glasgow*, vol. II: 1830 to 1912 (Manchester and New York, 1996), 150.

³⁴ M. Edward, *Who Belongs to Glasgow?: 200 Years of Migration* (Glasgow, 1993), 34–6; Withers, 'The demographic history of the city', 151.

³⁵ Withers, 'The demographic history of the city', 149–50.

³⁶ Edward, *Glasgow*, 58.

in Britain faced is well known, and Glasgow was no exception. The poor state of health and extreme poverty of the migrants from the Famine did not generally lead to sympathy for their plight. The *Glasgow Herald* offers a typical example of the negative terms in which Catholics were portrayed: 'The streets of Glasgow are at present literally swarming with poor vagrants from the sister kingdom, and the misery of these can scarcely be less than what they have fled or been driven from at home.'³⁷ Another Glasgow paper, the *Witness*, went as far as to blame the Famine itself on 'a religion of dependency and indigence'.³⁸

The sectarian tension between the Protestant and Catholic populations, and the growth of Orangeism in Glasgow during the nineteenth century, was partially a reaction to the Irish immigration which followed the Famine, but primarily stimulated by the large number of Protestant migrants from the North of Ireland that settled in the city. In the years 1876–81, 83.2 per cent of the Irish immigrants to Scotland came from the North, and the majority of those from the most Protestant counties.³⁹ The annual Orange Walk in Glasgow was the scene of violent sectarian confrontations from its inception. The first recorded public procession in Scotland by the Orange Order on the 'Twelfth' was in Glasgow in 1821, and ended in a virtual riot.⁴⁰ After another major public disturbance at a Twelfth procession a year later, the city magistrates banned the Orangemen from holding further processions. However, 50 years later, a Twelfth procession was permitted in Glasgow, and thus the Orange Walk embedded itself in Scottish culture.⁴¹ During the inter-war years, every Walk held in Scotland resulted in a violent conflict of some sort apart from that held in 1939.⁴² The Orange processions of 8 July 1935 in Glasgow provide a good example of the disturbances and the Gorbals as a site for these clashes. The *Glasgow Herald* reported:

Disturbances broke out in several districts of Glasgow on Saturday night as Orange processionists, who had taken part in the celebrations at Johnstone to commemorate the Battle of the Boyne, were returning to their headquarters in the city. Over 50 arrests were made during the night ... The most serious outbreak occurred in the Gorbals district following on the arrest of two young men. An attack was made upon the police, and in view of the large crowd it was considered

³⁷ D.M. MacRaild, *Irish Migrants in Modern Britain, 1750–1922* (Basingstoke, 1999), 62. In fact, there was considerable hostility leading, on occasion, to physical violence towards Irish migrants in Glasgow before the arrival of Famine victims in the city. Edward, *Glasgow*, 47–8 and 55.

³⁸ MacRaild, *Irish Migrants*, 62.

³⁹ I.G.C. Hutchison, 'Glasgow working-class politics', in R.A. Cage (ed.), *The Working Class in Glasgow 1750–1914* (London, Sydney and Wolfeboro, NH, 1987), 129.

⁴⁰ W.S. Marshall, *The Billy Boys: A Concise History of Orangeism in Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1996), 13.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 51–2.

⁴² B. Murray, *The Old Firm: Sectarianism, Sport and Society in Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1984), 154–6.

necessary to send for aid . . . Two men were conveyed to the Royal Infirmary with wounds stated to have been inflicted by stabbing.⁴³

These violent instances suggest life in the district was subject to considerable divisions based on ethnicity and religion. As a result, Protestant and Catholic interactions with the Jewish community in the Gorbals were, to some extent, filtered through these existing tensions. One of my respondents, Mrs Abrahams (born in 1912), offered an example of how views on the Jewish community were shaped by the city's sectarian divide: 'I've heard it so many times. A Protestant say, "I'd rather my child married a Jew than a Catholic."' ⁴⁴ Whilst relations between the three communities were complex and fraught with tension, the testimony we will consider in the following section suggests a picture that is characterized less by conflict than one might expect.

Everyday life with the Cohens, the Kellys and the Stewarts

Most historians seem to agree that anti-Semitism in Glasgow was comparatively rare. Kenneth Collins, for instance, has claimed that '[t]here was little serious anti-Semitism and the community was well tolerated, even in the Gorbals where the Jews formed a significant and visible minority'.⁴⁵ In his autobiography, Jack Caplan – a Jewish resident of the Gorbals – praised the relations between the different groups in his district:

In that small area, the Gorbals, a link was forged. Three races had united. Though belonging to different religions and coming from differing backgrounds, an affinity grew and developed. It was common for any one tenement to have Jews, Scots and Irish families living together. Verily the Cohens and Kellys, strengthened by the Stewarts or McDonalds.⁴⁶

In the interviews conducted for this article, six female respondents – Mrs Adler (born in 1917), Mrs Berkowitz (born in 1926), Mrs Danzig (born in 1931), Mrs Friedlander (born in 1926), Mrs Greenberg (born in 1918) and Mrs Solomons (born in 1926) – claimed that they had not experienced any anti-Semitism whilst growing up in the Gorbals.⁴⁷ Mrs Greenberg mentioned several non-Jewish residents of the Gorbals who learnt to speak Yiddish, 'because they came into contact with Jewish people, and they were quick at picking up languages'.⁴⁸ Three of my male respondents also

⁴³ *Glasgow Herald*, 8 Jul. 1935.

⁴⁴ Tape: Mrs Abrahams – 19.7.05 – Side 2 – 0570.

⁴⁵ Collins (ed.), *Aspects of Scottish Jewry*, 52. In his comprehensive study of anti-Semitism in British society, Colin Holmes only mentions Glasgow once, and that is in connection with some possible discrimination against Jews in the housing market during the 1930s. C. Holmes, *Anti-Semitism in British Society 1876–1939* (London, 1979), 205.

⁴⁶ J. Caplan, *Memories of the Gorbals* (Oxford, 1994), 83–4.

⁴⁷ Tape: Mrs Adler – 24.7.05 – 2312; Tape: Mrs Berkowitz – 21.7.05 – 1658–60; Tape: Mr Danzig – 28.8.03 – Side 2 – 0577; Tape: Mrs Friedlander – 20.7.05 – 1374; Tape: Mrs Greenberg – 24.7.05 – 2050; Tape: Mrs Solomons – 21.7.05 – 1860.

⁴⁸ Tape: Mrs Greenberg – 24.7.05 – 2335.

claimed that there was little anti-Semitism: as Mr Cowan (born in 1922) put it, 'I can't say I recorded any discrimination at the time when I was growing up.'⁴⁹ Mr Sacks (born in 1931) stressed the mixing between the Jewish and non-Jewish communities, referring to his non-Jewish friends and the absence of problems with his non-Jewish friends or neighbours.⁵⁰ Similarly, Mr Goldman (born in 1923) said that he did not personally experience any anti-Semitism in the Gorbals, and that there were no tensions between Jewish and non-Jewish neighbours.⁵¹ He did, however, add a caveat: 'I think it varies, you know, different people, different circumstances, different schools. I mean I wouldn't say it [i.e. anti-Semitism] didn't exist but, as far as I was aware, I wasn't conscious of it.'⁵²

However, this picture of peaceful co-existence is rejected by other respondents. Speaking of her childhood experiences in the Gorbals during the 1930s, Mrs Rosenberg (born in 1932) disputed the accounts of those who claimed not to have experienced anti-Semitism in the district. As she put it, 'some people have said to me they didn't come across anti-Semitism. I think they've forgotten. Certainly we did in the Gorbals.'⁵³ Another respondent, Mr Zuckerman (born in 1910), claimed not to have had any personal experiences of anti-Semitism, but used this as an argument for the uniqueness of his experience. He claims that, mostly due to his sporting prowess, he was accepted everywhere: 'I was different. I had so many Gentile friends, I had open sesame anywhere. I had no problems at all.'⁵⁴ Beyond his personal experience, though, he felt that 'Anti-Semitism was natural, it was a fact of life.'⁵⁵

How are we to reconcile the differing accounts of anti-Semitism in the district? First, one has to acknowledge the possibility that some individuals may have had an experience that was relatively free of prejudice as a result of their particular circumstances. For example, Mrs Adler spent much of her time within her extended family circle, and also happened to live in tenements that were solely occupied by Jewish residents. She said that she never had non-Jewish friends as a child and thus, apart from her time at school, had very little contact with people outside the Jewish community.⁵⁶ Secondly, it is important to consider the way that nostalgia may have shaped the memories of these respondents in such a way as to 'edit out' negative or painful experiences. One must also take into account the type of account that an individual wishes to give of themselves in an interview.⁵⁷

⁴⁹ Tape: Mr Cowan – 21.7.05 – 0958–90.

⁵⁰ Tape: Mr Sacks – 19.7.05 – 1695 – 1258 and 1530.

⁵¹ Tape: Mr Goldman – 25.8.03 – Side 2 – 0475–80.

⁵² Tape: Mr Goldman – 25.8.03 – Side 2 – 0587–605.

⁵³ Tape: Mrs Rosenberg – 18.7.05 – 1530.

⁵⁴ Tape: Mr Zuckerman – Side 2 – 24.8.03 – 0610–40.

⁵⁵ Tape: Mr Zuckerman – Side 2 – 24.8.03 – 1829–900.

⁵⁶ Tape: Mrs Adler – 24.7.05 – 0600, 2100 and 2314.

⁵⁷ Thomson, 'Unreliable memories?', 28–33.

Regarding attitudes to the Jewish community in Glasgow, both historians and former residents have drawn particular attention to positive relations with Catholics in the district.⁵⁸ In his memoirs, the former Labour politician Manny Shinwell suggested that Jewish and Irish residents in the Gorbals were largely friendly, despite occasional outbreaks of anti-Semitism.⁵⁹ Two of my respondents, Mrs Berkowitz and Mrs Solomons, also testified to this affinity between Catholics and Jews. Describing her childhood in Thistle Street in the Gorbals, Mrs Berkowitz said that 'there was a lot of Catholics, and the Jewish people and the Catholics got on very well. It was a lovely life I had there . . . The Catholics and the Jewish people seemed to understand each other, and I used to do the shopping for all of them.'⁶⁰ Mrs Solomons described her Catholic neighbours as 'wonderful people' and said that there was a good relationship between the Jewish and Catholic residents in her tenement.⁶¹ In contrast to these accounts, Mrs Cohen (born in 1931) had the impression that there was little difference between the attitude of the Catholic and Protestant residents of the district towards the Jewish community. This view was also expressed by Mrs Danzig.⁶² Similarly, Ralph Glasser wrote in his memoirs that members of the Irish Catholic community were 'as ready as Protestants' to shout out anti-Semitic insults in the street to Jews on their way to the Synagogue. At the same time, he suggested that Irish Catholics had a better relationship with the Jewish exiles than they did with the indigenous Protestants.⁶³

The testimony by Irish Catholic immigrants from Donegal, collected for BBC Scotland's *Odyssey* series, includes one example of an Irish Catholic interviewee discussing her interactions with a Jewish family in the Gorbals. Her testimony suggests a positive relationship that, however, was open to misunderstandings:

So I was lucky enough to get in with this lovely couple, they were very good to me. As a matter of fact she was an Irish woman she was from Dublin and they were Jews and I was a mother's help lookin' after her wee girl. Now when I went to Scotland I was naïve and I thought everybody had the same religion and with me being Catholic I decided to teach the wee Jewish girl her prayers, and she picked it up very quick. She used to stand in her cot every morning and she would say

⁵⁸ Kenefick, 'Comparing the Jewish and Irish communities', 55. For example, Kenefick quotes a Jewish respondent as saying, 'So we grew up in a mixed group of Jews and non-Jews. We were all friendly and mixed very well' – *ibid.*, 56. The novelist Muriel Spark saw Jews and Catholics as having a shared experience of discrimination which, it could be argued, would serve to unite the two groups. P. Reilly, 'Kicking with the left foot: being Catholic in Scotland', in T.M. Devine (ed.), *Scotland's Shame? Bigotry and Sectarianism in Modern Scotland* (Edinburgh and London, 2000), 32–3.

⁵⁹ Manny Shinwell, *Lead with the Left: My First Ninety-Six Years* (London, 1981), 18.

⁶⁰ Tape: Mrs Berkowitz – 21.7.05 – 0520–50.

⁶¹ Tape: Mrs Solomons – 21.7.05 – 1450 and 1929.

⁶² Tape: Mrs Cohen – 26.4.02 – Side 2 – 2370–90; Tape: Mr Danzig – 28.8.03 – Side 2 – 1720.

⁶³ R. Glasser, *Growing up in the Gorbals* (London, 1987), 22.

Hail Mary and God bless this and that and I thought I was doin' a wonderful job until I got a fortnight's holidays and the mother took over then.⁶⁴

When the girl's mother eventually found out about this, she took it in good humour, and it did not damage the relationship between them.

Growing up in the Gorbals

Overall, the picture that emerges of the Gorbals is of a community in which ethnic and religious tensions were largely kept in check. However, these tensions still simmered away below the surface and were acutely felt by children and adolescents. Parental attitudes on different sides of the ethnic divide could operate to put up barriers between the different sections of the community. Mrs Rosenberg recounted how a friend of hers stopped seeing her because she was Jewish.⁶⁵ Another interviewee, Mrs Abrahams, gave an example of how parental attitudes influenced the views of their children:

I had a very good friend [Peggy] ... who was not Jewish ... and we used to walk home [together] and we were having a lovely conversation, arm in arm [when Peggy said] 'My Daddy said that you should go back to Jerusalem, to Palestine.' I said, 'What for?' She said, 'Because this isn't your country.' ... So I said to her, 'I've got news for you, I'm every bit as Scottish as you are. So there.' 'Well my Daddy said you're not.' And we were still walking arm in arm.' 'Cheerio, I'll see you tomorrow.'⁶⁶

Whilst the two girls did not fall out over this exchange, Mrs Abrahams' father intervened soon afterwards to end the friendship:

I got ready to go out, and my father said, 'Where are you going?' I said, 'I'm going to meet [Peggy].' He said, 'Oh no, you're not.' I said, 'Why not?' He said, 'Because she's not Yiddish, you're not going.' I said, 'But she's my best friend.' 'No, you're not going.' And he was such a quiet, mild man, and he was insistent that I wouldn't go. So there you are.⁶⁷

Although parents could seek to limit the interactions between Jewish and non-Jewish children, this did not extend to schooling, as there was no Jewish day school in the Gorbals.⁶⁸ It seems that Jewish schoolchildren were not easily distinguishable by their dress which, had they tended towards a more Orthodox style of clothing, might have marked them out as 'different'. This is a point that Mr Goldman felt was significant. He says that, 'We [i.e. Jewish children] didn't stand out in any way. I don't

⁶⁴ B. Kay, 'From the Gorbals to Gweedore', in B. Kay (ed.), *Odyssey: Voices from Scotland's Recent Past* (Edinburgh, 1980), 6.

⁶⁵ Tape: Mrs Rosenberg – 18.7.05 – 1600.

⁶⁶ Tape: Mrs Abrahams – 19.7.05 – 2038–90.

⁶⁷ Tape: Mrs Abrahams – 19.7.05 – 2105–20.

⁶⁸ Kaplan, *The Gorbals*, 23.

remember any child at school ever wearing a *yarmulke* [i.e. skullcap].⁶⁹ Mrs Rosenberg, however, suggested that it was at the schooling age that problems started:

Until we went to school, we played together all sorts of kids, but once you went to school, and they got older, they realised that you were Jewish, there was this enmity, there wasn't just separateness. I always used to dread going up the Close [i.e. tenement] because if there was a crowd of kids around they used to shout things like, 'You're a dirty Jew!' You know, and I used to say, 'Well I'm cleaner than you', because they were pretty dirty. It was quite nerve-racking to go up and down the stairs, you know.⁷⁰

How did sectarian tensions impact on the lives of Jewish children who went to school in the Gorbals? Kenefick argues that Jewish children were seen as essentially neutral in sectarian terms, yet he also suggests that they were targeted by Catholic children as they went to Protestant schools.⁷¹ One of the interviewees, Mr Danzig, pointed to the predominance of sectarian rivalry, meaning that 'no-one ever bothered with the Jews'.⁷² At the same time, he acknowledged that Jewish children could be identified with the school or the neighbourhood that they lived in. Identifying oneself as Jewish was not always enough to escape a beating. Mr Danzig, Mrs Cohen and Mr Goldman all mentioned that they were sometimes asked whether they were 'a Protestant Jew or a Catholic Jew'.⁷³ This theological *non sequitur* also features in other accounts of the period, and points at the way in which sectarian tensions informed attitudes towards the Jewish community.⁷⁴

As a result, the everyday experience of Jewish children was one in which sectarian tensions could be as prominent as (or even more prominent than) the encounter with anti-Semitic attitudes. This is exemplified by the recollections of Mrs Cohen, who grew up in a tenement that also housed a Catholic family (the Kellys) and a Protestant family (the Stewarts). She said that occasionally she would notice the word 'Jews' written on the wall outside her family's front door. Although Mrs Cohen did not know who wrote graffiti outside her own door, she was aware that the Stewart children were responsible for the frequent appearance of anti-Catholic slogans outside the Kellys' door and that they would also shout abuse

⁶⁹ Tape: Mr Goldman – 25.8.03 – Side 2 – 1990.

⁷⁰ Tape: Mrs Rosenberg – 18.7.05 – 1275–320.

⁷¹ Kenefick, 'Comparing the Jewish and Irish communities', 56.

⁷² Tape: Mr Danzig – 28.8.03 – Side 2 – 1670. Although the schools in the district were segregated along religious lines, a tiny minority of Catholic parents chose to send their children to Protestant schools, so there was some mixing in the school environment. Tape: Mrs Cohen – 26.4.02 – Side 2 – 1350.

⁷³ Tape: Mr Danzig – 28.8.03 – Side 2 – 1712. Tape: Mrs Cohen – 26.4.02 – Side 2 – 1430–40. Tape: Mr Goldman – 25.8.03 – Side 2 – 0658 – 0662.

⁷⁴ See, for example, P. Dudgeon, *Our Glasgow Memories of Life in Disappearing Britain* (London, 2009), 237–8.

through the Kellys' letterbox on occasion.⁷⁵ Although Mr Stewart was, apparently, a generally even-tempered man, when he got drunk, he would hurl abuse at the Catholic family from the top floor of the tenement, and on one occasion, this got too much for Mrs Kelly:

One night Mrs Kelly, who was over 80, was asleep in bed, and Mr Stewart began shouting abuse down the stairs, and the woman was so frightened that she ran out in her nightgown and her bare feet. But she was very ill you see, and she got a lot worse, and they reckoned it hastened her death.⁷⁶

Violent ruptures and sectarian flashpoints

The examples discussed thus far indicate a somewhat uneasy co-existence between the different groups that lived in the Gorbals. Tensions may have been hidden at times, but they would periodically rise to the surface in open conflict. One phrase that looms large in this context is the challenge 'Are you a Billy or a Dan, or an old tin can'. Evelyn Cowan explains this phrase in her autobiography:

A Billy was a Protestant and a Dan was a Catholic. And an old tin can was a Jew. So if you admitted you were an old tin can, you got kicked around the street just like that piece of metal. Vaguely, we always knew of someone who got beaten up by the gangs. But it was never one of our immediate circle.⁷⁷

In my interviews, Mr Zuckermann quoted the phrase 'a Billy or a Dan, or an old tin can' to demonstrate that Jews were 'despised' by the non-Jews in the district.⁷⁸ Furthermore, despite stressing their own positive experiences with regard to inter-community relations, both Mr Lipman (born in 1923) and Mrs Laski (born in 1929) also mentioned being confronted with this phrase at school or on the way to school.⁷⁹ The rhyme could be a prelude to violent confrontations: Glasser describes facing the same question with his friend as a small boy, but only being offered the alternatives of Billy or Dan, and not understanding the meaning of either term. In this instance, the boys managed to diffuse the situation through simple questioning.⁸⁰ Caplan, on the other hand, describes a boyhood encounter with a Catholic gang that did result in a physical confrontation:

Sometimes the juvenile gangs from Coburg Street (the 'Coburg Erin') who were Catholics or the 'Young Cumbies' from the Cumberland Street, Protestants, would invade South Portland Street, a mainly Jewish section, with synagogue and Jewish Institute. When this occurred we usually dived into the nearest tenement to hide.

⁷⁵ Tape: Mrs Cohen – 26.4.02 – Side 2 – 2440–70.

⁷⁶ Tape: Mrs Cohen – 26.4.02 – Side 2 – 2470–90.

⁷⁷ E. Cowan, *Spring Remembered: A Scottish Jewish Childhood* (Edinburgh, 1974), 101–2.

⁷⁸ Tape: Mr Zuckerman – Side 2 – 24.8.03 – 1829–900.

⁷⁹ Tape: Mr Lipman – 19.7.05 – 1085–115. Tape: Mrs Laski – 21.7.05 – 2180–200. Tape: Mrs Laski – 21.7.05 – Side 2 – 0820–30.

⁸⁰ Glasser, *Growing Up*, 2–3.

On one memorable day, with Jerry and two other 'stalwarts' to back me up with moral support, I decided that a stand had to be made.⁸¹

Caplan goes on to describe the fight that ensued between himself and the gang leader. His account of this incident is interesting for several reasons. First, he leaves us in no doubt that the attack was motivated by anti-Semitism, which he explains with reference to the views of the children's parents.⁸² Secondly, it reinforces Glasser's point that, despite the relative harmony between Jews and Catholics, anti-Semitic views were present within both the Catholic and the Protestant communities. Finally, it demonstrates that members of the Jewish community were also capable of defending themselves, and were not just passive victims of prejudice.

The testimony of Mr Levy (born in 1923) seems to confirm these observations. He encountered quite a lot of verbal abuse from non-Jewish boys, but said that there were very few actual fights. As he put it, 'there were a few minor clashes, but there was a lot of Jewish boys able to handle themselves too'.⁸³ He elaborated on one alternative way in which these encounters might unfold:

You walk along, especially with the Irish, they see you when they're drunk, and they say, 'You're a dirty Jew.' You just walked on. You had the odd cases where some of the hooligans would come up, especially the Catholic boys, to where we played in the back yards looking for trouble. When we saw them coming, we just disappeared.⁸⁴

Based on his experiences, Mr Levy rejected notions about a close relationship between Jews and Irish Catholics, claiming that 'the Catholics were more anti-Semitic than the Protestants'.⁸⁵

The street fighting encountered by the Gorbals' young residents was only one type of violent encounter in the district. The most well-known manifestation of sectarian violence in Glasgow was linked to the rivalry between the city's two principal football teams, Rangers and Celtic, representing Protestant and Catholic allegiances respectively.⁸⁶ As Doctor Stane, who worked in the Gorbals and Bridgeton district during this period said, '[a]nd believe you me, on a Saturday night after a Celtic and Rangers match you didn't have to look too far for trouble'.⁸⁷ One of my interviewees, Mr Danzig, described this phenomenon in more dramatic terms: 'There was blood everywhere when Rangers played Celtic, and the police couldn't handle it'.⁸⁸ At the same time, he stressed that 'when the

⁸¹ Caplan, *Memories*, 73.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 77–8.

⁸³ Tape: Mr Levy – 21.7.05 – 1195–2005.

⁸⁴ Tape: Mr Levy – 21.7.05 – 1160–80.

⁸⁵ Tape: Mr Levy – 21.7.05 – Side 2 – 1786.

⁸⁶ See for example Murray, *Old Firm*.

⁸⁷ J. Gathorne-Hardy, *Doctors: The Lives and Work of GPs* (London, 1984), 12.

⁸⁸ Tape: Mr Danzig – 28.8.03 – Side 2 – 1580.

match wasn't on they [i.e. Catholics and Protestants] stayed in their own territories'.⁸⁹

There were, indeed, routine clashes between Rangers and Celtic supporters on match days in various parts of the city as each group sought to provoke the other by invading their rivals' territory, as Andrew Davies' research has shown.⁹⁰ For example, in April 1930, a group of 40 to 50 Billy Boys paraded through the Gorbals carrying banners, flags and a replica of the Scottish Cup on their way back from a match. Their presence attracted the attention of the, predominantly Catholic, South Side Stickers, resulting in a violent confrontation between the two gangs.⁹¹

However, violent confrontations between Catholics and Protestants were not just confined to Old Firm matches. Not only did the Protestants also tend to march on every Catholic holiday as an act of provocation, the Billy Boys even had a church parade every Sunday, during which they deliberately marched through Catholic streets.⁹² We have already seen that the annual celebration of the Battle of the Boyne on the Twelfth of July was another obvious sectarian flashpoint. Two of my respondents mentioned St Patrick's Day as another time when these tensions rose to the surface.⁹³ Mrs Abrahams said that when she was at school St Patrick's Day was invariably an occasion when children would gang together according to their religious affiliation and target other children in order to ask, 'Are you a Billy or a Dan, or an old tin can?'⁹⁴ Kenefick quotes a respondent, born in the Gorbals in 1912, who offers a similar childhood account:

You don't encounter anti-Semitism from children, you get that from adults ... [there was] one day a year – St. Patrick's Day when the Roman Catholics came about and they got at the Protestants. When they were going up to the school, you heard them shouting out, are you a Billy or a Dan? If you say the wrong thing, you get hit on the head. But in those days – you didn't – I don't think at school I ever experienced any anti-Semitism.⁹⁵

One of my respondents, Mr Levy, referred to Easter as a particular flashpoint, especially with regard to relations with Catholics in the district:

We got it when it came to Easter. 'You Jews killed Christ.' It was always the Catholics. We killed Christ. 'Go back to Palestine,' they kept telling us ... They

⁸⁹ Tape: Mr Danzig – 28.8.03 – Side 2 – 1595.

⁹⁰ A. Davies, 'Football and sectarianism in Glasgow during the 1920s and 1930s', *Irish Historical Studies*, 35 (2006), 202.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 211.

⁹² Dudgeon, *Our Glasgow*, 224; P. Sillitoe, *Cloak without Dagger* (London, 1955), 130.

⁹³ Tape: Mrs Danzig – 28.8.03 – Side 2 – 1587. William Kenefick also quotes a Jewish respondent who cited St Patrick's Day as an occasion for sectarian conflict. Kenefick, 'Comparing the Jewish and Irish communities', 56. Andrew Davies points out that, 'Like their adult counterparts, gangs of schoolboys followed the festive calendar, with gangs of Protestant boys seeking confrontations at the gates of Catholic schools on St Patrick's Day and Catholic boys seeking retribution on the Twelfth of July.' Davies, 'Football and sectarianism', 207.

⁹⁴ Tape: Mrs Abrahams – 19.7.05 – Side 2 – 0280.

⁹⁵ Kenefick, 'Comparing the Jewish and Irish communities', 56.

were taught in the Catholic Church that the Jews killed Christ. So we used to get that, these verbal things. It was all shouting and bawling at each other. We answered back with some cheeky remarks about Christ and the Pope and all the usual stuff. But I never really had a fight with any non-Jewish boys. In fact, I palled up with a few of them.⁹⁶

Conclusion

This article has explored the complexities of inter-ethnic relations in the Gorbals during the inter-war period. It has considered the variety of individual experiences within the Jewish community of the Gorbals in this period which were shaped by the diversity of their encounters with Catholic and Protestant neighbours. On the other hand, it has also demonstrated that there are particular occasions where inter-ethnic relations are all too predictable, almost following a 'calendar of conflict'. Thus, while the focus on individual testimony foregrounds the agency of the individual, and the significance of personal characteristics and circumstances in determining the lived experience of a community, the recurrence of particular moments of conflict on particular occasions illustrates the manner in which social structures almost seem to compel individuals to act in particular manners associated with their group identity. This is in accordance with the theory of structuration as outlined by Anthony Giddens which holds that 'Structure is not to be equated with constraint, but is always both constraining and enabling.'⁹⁷ Thus, this approach views ethnicity as forming structures of action that makes certain forms of behaviour more likely than others, but also views individuals as knowledgeable social actors who can also transcend the expectations created by their 'ethnic belonging'.⁹⁸

Oral testimony reveals the way in which the divisions within the community were, to some extent, suppressed in daily life, but rose to the surface on particular occasions and also within the semi-private space of the tenement itself, where the proximity of those from different faiths did periodically result in open conflict. Thus, Caplan's description of the harmonious relationship between Catholics, Jews and Protestants in the Gorbals is partially contradicted by the testimony considered here. Although there is some evidence of harmonious inter-ethnic relations in the district, the testimony cited in this article points at fairly persistent tensions. Some respondents testify to the warmth of the relationship between Irish Catholic and Jewish residents, yet others claim that there was little difference in the attitudes of the two groups. A third group of

⁹⁶ Tape: Mr Levy – 21.7.05 – 1260–305.

⁹⁷ C. Karner, *Ethnicity and Everyday Life* (London and New York, 2007), 29. For a full account of structuration theory see A. Giddens, *The Constitution of Society* (Cambridge, 1984).

⁹⁸ Karner, *Ethnicity*, 29.

respondents points at particular conflicts with Catholic residents of the district.

Most of the interviewees claimed not to have experienced any anti-Semitism. Integration between the Jewish and non-Jewish residents of the district was facilitated by several factors. First, the fact that Jewish and non-Jewish children were schooled together, and Jewish children were also not easily distinguishable by their dress. The children of the Jewish immigrants to the area also seemed to have embraced their dual identity as both Scottish and Jewish. In addition, we have seen that social boundaries in the district were often porous as Jewish organizations were not exclusive, and young Jewish people in particular moved freely between Jewish institutions and the wider community. One respondent, Mr Levy, suggested that such interactions did not necessarily testify to a warm relationship: 'We mixed a lot with the *Goyim*, but not as friendly, you tolerated each other at times.'⁹⁹

While some individuals may indeed have had an experience that was relatively free of anti-Semitism, Jewish residents in the Gorbals were, on occasion, subject to verbal and physical attacks. However, violent confrontation seems to have been comparatively rare and in no way equalled the severity and frequency of sectarian violence in the city. Jewish shops were not subject to attack, and there was no regular organized demonstration of hostility to the Jewish presence in the city comparable to the Billy Boys' regular raids on Catholic districts. Anti-Semitism in the Gorbals was mediated through the sectarian rivalry, which was the dominant religious conflict in the city.

⁹⁹ Tape: Mr Levy – 21.7.05 – 1160–70.